

American Speed and Movies Please Ibanez

The Spanish Novelist Has Already Found Material Here for Two New Volumes

By Solita Solano

VICENTE BLASCO IBANEZ, novelist extraordinary, soldier of fortune, cowboy, sailor, Commander of the Legion of Honor, revolutionist and the founder of a city, sat in a small room of the Hotel Belmont nursing a cold. This he was doing after the usual formula followed by foreigners, who believe that all maladies come from sitting in a "current of air."

With all windows closed and steam sizzling from the radiators, the distinguished Spaniard was huddled in a chair. A winter overcoat was buttoned tightly over his broad chest. A red and brown muffler encircled his throat. A cap was pulled down over his ears. The temperature of the room was easily a hundred degrees, but the hands of Blasco Ibanez were thrust up his coat-sleeves in the same manner in which a monk folds his arms in the sleeves of his habit.

He arose to greet me and exclaimed, "How agreeable to have an interview in Spanish!" He withdrew his hands from their shelter. I saw they were muscular and quick with nervous energy that is the keynote of this man and without which he could never have written in a bare three months such voluminous novels as "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" or "Mare Nostrum."

Apologizing for wearing his cap, he repeated himself in his great stuffed chair, hunching his shoulders and retaining this posture with the rigidity of an eagle watching from a lofty perch, motionless but for the eyes, alive with light and missing nothing.

"First your news," I suggested, by way of establishing relations.

"News first. Yes, that would be an American requirement," he replied, and laughed himself out of all semblance to an eagle and into a fit of coughing.

"I landed only two weeks ago, but I had already learned of North America's speed and business efficiency. Also I had heard about the American interview. It is not drawn out with polite phrases and a description of the week-before-last's weather, like the European interview. Your interviewer asks, 'Born?' and writes down the answer, 'Spain.' 'Educated?' he next inquires. Questions like 'Do you write with a fountain pen?' 'Do you like spinach?' 'When will you have a republic in Spain?' follow. At least, that is what I have heard. I have not yet met an interviewer like that in North America, but that is, I suppose, because the newspapers here have special interviewers for foreigners, no?"

Into the Movies

"No," I said firmly; "but let us have your news. Your secretary said you had some."

"Rather wonderful news, I think," said Blasco Ibanez, excitedly.

"My 'Blood and Sand' is to be done into a play and Lionel Barrymore, who is, I understand, one of your best actors, will have the rôle of the bullfighter. Then it will be made into a cinema and Mr. Barrymore will act in that also. The contract is as good as made."

"How splendid! You like moving pictures, then, and approve of them as a medium?"

"Entirely. What better means could there be to reach the people? I have had some experience already with the cinema. When my 'Four Horsemen' and 'Mare Nostrum' were filmed, I myself directed the making of these pictures. They cannot be shown in this country, because no foreign films are admitted to North America."

(What the novelist referred to here is that the foreign film producers all over the world declare that their products are boycotted in this country by exhibitors who are either jealous or prefer to help their own countrymen profit on American films. American exhibitors state, on the other hand, that the boycott is purely imaginary, and that if the foreign films could pass our National Board of Censorship, or were appropriate for the American public, or conformed to our high standards of photography or directorship, they would gladly book them. The result in either

case is the same. Foreign films are not shown in America except in rare instances.)

The United States is always called "North America" by the novelist.

"Several film companies want my books from which to make scenarios and I am negotiating with them. If I have a success with these pictures I shall come here every year with new works for the cinema. This country is so young and so immense that it has already given me inspiration for two novels. My new book, begun recently, is about a Spanish woman who comes to this country to go into moving pictures. Her point of view is one of the themes of the novel—I say one of the themes because I have always two or three themes in my books."

While the novelist had been talking there had been interruptions at half minute intervals. The telephone near his head renewed its ringing each time the secretary replaced the receiver, announcing callers or requesting that the famous writer speak to such and such a publisher, a lecture bureau, a film company or a society matron in quest of a lion. Bellboys knocked at the door bearing messages, letters and telegrams. In the hall chairs were being placed for newspaper interviewers and photographers, with and without appointments.

'Dispense me, Don Vicente'

To this hubbub and bustle Blasco Ibanez was to all appearances oblivious. His ability to concentrate enabled him to ignore the clamor for his attention—except at such times as his secretary, deeming it necessary to receive guidance, touched him gently on the arm with a "Dispense me, Don Vicente."

Blasco Ibanez was relaxing. Evidently the appalling heat of the room had penetrated even that overcoat of heavy cloth. His hands had deserted his coat-sleeves and his shoulders had descended three inches from his ears. He was just beginning a story of how Anatole France said to him, "The day you write the story of your life will see the birth of the most interesting novel in the world," when the secretary halted the tale by handing him an invitation to dine with Mr. and Mrs. James W. Gerard.

"They've written me in Spanish!" exclaimed Blasco Ibanez, delightedly. He rose and, forgetting the process of his cure, pulled off his cap and snapped on a pair of black-rimmed spectacles.

"Now, how did they happen to know Spanish and that I don't know English?"

He seated himself at his desk to write an acceptance. Not to be outdone linguistically by the Gerards, he addressed the envelope in English, "Mr. and Mrs." His attempt resulted in a "Mv. and Mvs." and his secretary and I were called into consultation while he ran his hands through his black hair.

A New Novel

As the novelist was writing his note I noticed under his hand scattered sheets of his new novel, "The Enemy of Woman." These, carefully paraphrased and punctuated,

were written with a flowing hand in the time-honored pen and ink—the consecrated paper and the sanctified ink that have ever been the medium of the masters of literature. No such modern contraption as a typewriter or a stenographer had assisted in the task of transferring the daily quota of words from brain to paper. The pen-and-ink tradition is sacred in the eyes of Blasco Ibanez. It is a tradition that is walled about from the attacks of modernity with immemorial and classic custom.

While the novelist folded his letter I took note of the sturdy physique, capable of infinite endeavor, the massive head with its untidy black hair, his aristocratic, aquiline nose and the cleft chin that imparts a requisite softness to his strong features. The eyes, brown, keen and kind, bore signs of the weariness of protracted labor and much too little sleep.

"The face of a man who has thought hard, worked hard, lived hard and enjoyed all of it," I thought, and smiled as I recalled tales of the writer in his rôle of courtier to fair ladies. It has been said that Blasco Ibanez never married because the task of choosing one pretty adorer from the many who spoiled him was too great. His magnetic personality and his gift of the "common touch" must have been an irresistible combination.

"Aquí, muchacho," Blasco Ibanez called to the bellboy, who, lacking Spanish, remained motionless at the door until he saw the note held out to him.

"Fancy the Gerards knowing Spanish!" repeated Don Vicente, returning to his arm chair opposite me.

"That makes me happy. Spanish is a wonderful language and Spain is a wonderful country, not behind



Two photographs of Vicente Blasco Ibanez, now in America for the first time

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In an Interview in His Own Tongue He Speaks as Freely as He Writes

a combination of Victor Hugo and Emile Zola?"

The novelist looked modestly pleased.

Hugo His Idol

"They have compared me to Zola in Spain, yes. But I am unworthy to be compared to Victor Hugo. He is the writer of all those of this earth for whom I have the greatest admiration. In all my houses—I have a house in Valencia, where I was born, a house in Madrid, a chalet in Malvarrosa in the Mediterranean, a villa in Nice